



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## PROVERBS AND PHRASES.

THERE is a field for the collection, in all parts of the United States, of quaint and archaic phrases, which may still be found in use, but which are gradually disappearing before the uniformity of the written language. Almost every family preserves such reminiscences of a time when character was more individual, and expression more racy, than the movement and stir of modern life have permitted them to remain. Some of these it is proposed from time to time to gather under this head, as well as to include old-fashioned and rare terms, in the "Waste-Basket of Words." Such collection, when opportunity serves, will be found an agreeable employment of leisure, and contributions of such material will be gladly received, and used as occasion may offer.

An expression used to designate a person wanting in sense, formerly pretty well known in eastern Massachusetts, is "A perfect Nimshi;" in other words, a blockhead or numskull. Nimshi, it may be remembered, is known to history only as the ancestor of Jehu, whose name has become proverbial for a furious charioteer. "Why, you're a regular Jehu!" said, a generation ago, a Bostonian to his son, who was driving a newly purchased team. The boy, afterwards a lawyer famous for his wit, the late Mr. E. D. Sohier, replied: "You had better look in your Bible and see who Jehu was the son of!" Why the Hebrew nobleman, respecting whom the Book of Kings confers such scanty information, should have acquired a reputation for folly, is one of those numerous questions on which, for want of material, antiquarian investigation is not likely to throw light.

"To run like a boy after emptins," that is, to be in a great hurry. This phrase seems to have been pretty well known in eastern Massachusetts. "Emptins," or emptyings, were the dregs of beer, out of which yeast was formerly made. But why should a boy, contrary to the nature of boys, make haste on this particular household errand? The most plausible suggestion which we have heard made is, that the "emptins" were procured from the baker, who also kept gingerbread, and that the lad usually received a penny as encouragement to his speed. This may seem to derive confirmation from the consideration that the adage describes the youth as hastening in search of the yeast, but not as rapid in his return. This point also we must leave to the decision of persons curious in antiquity; at all events, the expression is characteristic of a life which has now passed away. Similar locutions, possessing some quaintness, are, "to be off like a potlid," and "to be off like a jug-handle."

"He ate it raw, as Bickford did his fish." The proverb, familiar

in Waldo County, Maine, signifies to make the best of an unpleasant necessity. The expression is explained by a myth, which, however, is less common. The hero is represented as taking counsel respecting the manner in which he is to prepare his one fish : he makes inquiry respecting every possible manner of cooking it, and invariably receives the same response, that he is to eat it raw. —*G. H. Harmon, College Hill, Mass.*

"Everything is all criss-cross," that is, at sixes and sevens. An expression belonging chiefly to women, and probably generally current. So a tangled skein is said to be "all criss-cross." The derivation is from Christ-cross, in which only the last part of the compound has retained force.

Among proverbial comparisons which are really popular, only a very small number relate to plants. Of flowers, chiefly the rose and the lily have found favor in common speech. But these are so familiar through literature that the expressions in which they are used, "Red as a rose," "White as a lily," seem rather to belong to the language of books. Of trees, again, comparisons with the oak, in America are scarcely popular. On the other hand, "straight as a pine," is a familiar phrase of the people, though not especially idiomatic. More characteristic are the following New England locutions, which are the only ones relating to plants we have hitherto procured : —

"Pretty as a pink." This flower is used in literature too, — "the pink of courtesy." The "pink of perfection" is still a popular phrase. The comparison has remained in use, and taken, in New England at least, the place of the old English "red as a rose," probably because the complexion of New England beauty is more akin to the former flower.

"Coarser than pea-straw." Unrefined.

"Meaner than pusley." An expression of great contempt. Purslane is an extremely persistent and obnoxious herb in the garden.

"He has no more blood than a turnip." The sense is obvious : "Ye can't get blood from a turnip."

"To stick like a bean-leaf." Any one who has tried the experiment will find how closely the tendrils of the bean will cling.

These are all New England phrases. They will perhaps be sufficient to call attention to the field of inquiry, and opportunity for useful collection.

*W. W. N.*